

STARTING A SMALL BUSINESS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

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My top priority is to encourage economic development and the creation of new jobs for Southwest Virginians. We are achieving that goal in various ways, including a broad effort to realize our full potential to create and foster the growth of locally owned small businesses. Creating a climate that is favorable to small business startups and providing resources and other assistance to those who aspire to be small business owners is an important part of our strategy for promoting economic growth throughout our region and an important part of the work of my Congressional office.

A number of resources offering informational and financial support are available to entrepreneurs wishing to start a business in Southwest Virginia. Approximately ten years ago, I launched a program to encourage the development of small business incubators in communities throughout the region. Small business incubators provide support to individuals seeking to bring their good ideas to the commercial market, and can assist aspiring business owners with a number of activities such as developing a business plan and providing affordable office space.

Financial resources are also available to assist individuals in starting a business. Several agencies throughout the region administer revolving loan funds, such as the Ninth District Development Fund. I created the Ninth District Development Fund to provide a financial resource to emerging, tourism-related small businesses. For further information on the Ninth District Development Fund, contact Debbie Wagner at People Incorporated, the agency that administers the fund, at 276-623-9000.

Individuals wishing to start a small business in Southwest Virginia have an excellent

opportunity to obtain information from business experts. The Virginia Department of Business Assistance (VDBA), along with partners on the federal, state and local level, is offering a series of workshops entitled Entrepreneur Express: Moving Your Business Forward in several locations throughout Southwest Virginia in the coming months. These workshops started in Galax in 2006 when I joined with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance in hosting the Enterprise Fair at the Crossroads Institute. Due to the success of that event, the program has become a one-stop-shop for entrepreneurs, now being replicated statewide. To date, statewide more than 8,000 business owners have attended the workshops.

These free, half-day workshops include information on available business resources and deliver practical, hands-on training covering key elements of business practice such as starting or expanding a business, marketing strategies and financing. Business owners attending the workshop will have the opportunity to speak with the many state agencies and service providers who have partnered with the VDBA to present the workshops.

Upcoming Entrepreneur Express Workshops will be held on February 23 in Bristol at the King College Student Center, on March 18 in Lebanon at the Russell County Conference Center, on March 11 in Christiansburg at the New River Valley Mall New River Community College Auditorium, on March 19 at the Smyth County Career and Technology Center and on April 29 at the Wytheville Community Center.

Additionally, a special Entrepreneur Express Workshop focused on how small businesses can make use of social media, entitled "You-Link-Twit-Face: Start Using Social Media for Your Business," will take place on March 18 at the Crossroads Institute in Galax and on April 14 at the Dickenson County Center for Education and Research.

As a result of the success of the Entrepreneur Express workshops, the VDBA is leading new programs like including one on one counseling for businesses on topics such as business growth and marketing and Web 2.0 strategies. The Virginia Business One Stop and Virginia Business Information Center also provide answers and solutions to business related questions. For additional information on the VDBA programs, to register for one of the Entrepreneur Express workshops, or for information on one-on-one business counseling, contact Sandy Ratliff, Business Service Manager for VDBA at 276-676-3768 or visit <http://www.vastartup.org>.

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